Fantastic Realities: Magical Realism in Contemporary Okinawan Fiction

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Abstract

This paper examines magical realism in Okinawa bungaku *(Okinawan literature) with a special focus on the literary works of Medoruma Shun. The central research questions are what kind of Okinawan realities these magical-realistic texts point towards and which real problems thus become obvious. Against the theoretical background regarding the discussions on magical realism in literary science, qualitative analyses of the two short stories 'Akai yashi no ha' (1992) and 'Umukaji tō chiritei' (1999) are conducted. The findings of these analyses show that the narrative mode of magical realism is used to point towards post-colonial power relations and to express a political critique of contemporary relationships with mainland Japan and the United States from an Okinawan point of view.*

Keywords: *Okinawa bungaku*, magical realism, Medoruma Shun

Introduction

This paper aims to explore how the use of magical realism in contemporary fiction from Okinawa 沖縄 enhances an understanding of Okinawan realities. As other researchers have shown, magical realism can be found in diverse literary works from this Japanese prefecture (Bhowmik 2003: passim; Bhowmik 2008: 133-157; Bouterey 2011: 35-215; Hein 2010a: 185-188; Hein 2011: 180-184; Hein 2012a: 60-69; Molasky 2003: 172-185; Suzuki 2007: 20-34). In this paper, the focus lies on Medoruma Shun 目取真俊，one of the best-known Okinawan writers in present-day Japan, and the qualitative analyses of two of his short stories that have not yet been looked at from a literary scientist's point of view. Medoruma touches upon political, cultural and religious topics in his works and uses magical realism in order to help outsiders understand the current struggles and problems of Okinawan society. More precisely, Okinawa can be regarded as a political and social focal point in Japan through its (post-)colonial history. Thus, this paper not only seeks to contribute to literary science, but also to research on the Japanese self-conception in the field of Japanese studies.

Definitions

This section explains some of the basic concepts with which this paper operates. During the following pages, some basic information about Okinawa's history will also be given. For a better understanding of these incidents, I recommend Josef Kreiner's anthology *Ryūkyū in World History* (2001), as well as the recent monograph by Gavan McCormack and Norimatsu Satoko Oka 乗松聡子, *Resistant Islands: Okinawa Confronts Japan and the United States* (2012).

Okinawa bungaku

Simply speaking, the term *Okinawa bungaku* 沖縄文学 describes Okinawan literature. However, there is some discussion going on in the field of literary studies; the main question is if authors of such texts need to be born in Okinawa or if it is sufficient that the story takes place in an Okinawan setting. Put differently, there is no consensus about the characteristics of texts that are labelled *Okinawa bungaku*. For this paper the definition by the literary scholar Yonaha Keiko 与那覇恵子 will be used as a guideline. She describes *Okinawa bungaku* as works in which the plot takes place in Okinawa and whose authors need to have a comprehensive experience of Okinawan ways of living (Yonaha 1996: 205).

Okinawa as post-colonial subject

Even though Okinawa officially never was a colony, there are a large number of researchers who refer to Okinawa as a 'colony' or a 'quasi-colony' of either Japan or the United States (US) right up to the present day (see Hein 2010b: 159; Oguma 2006; McCormack 2003: 93; Smits 1999:46; Taira 1997; Tanji 2006: 1; Uemura 2003). But what exactly is a colony?

The historian Jürgen Osterhammel defines three types of colonies, the first of which are colonies of exploitation. They are the result of military actions and are used for economic exploitation. They serve further as strategic points that sustain the imperial policy of the coloniser. These colonies are governed in an autocratic fashion from the centre, meaning the colonising nation (Osterhammel 2009: 17). Regarding the period from 1609—Satsuma's 薩摩 invasion of the Ryūkyūs 琉球—to 1941, when Japan entered World War II, Okinawa can be seen as a colony of exploitation. After their annexation, the Ryūkyūs were governed from Tōkyō 東京 and served the broadening of the Japanese sphere of power. Of greatest importance for the Japanese state at that time was the trade with China, and later Okinawa served as a good strategic point from which further colonisation could be accomplished.

Secondly, Osterhammel speaks of maritime enclaves, which are the result of fleet attacks. They are mostly used as strategic checkpoints through which further territories can be reached and colonised (Osterhammel 2009: 17). As stated above, Japan used Okinawa in this fashion for its expansion into South Asia. Later, the US, too, occupied Okinawa with the same intention after World War II. The main aim was to secure a safe haven in Asia for the wars in Korea and Vietnam.

Thirdly, Osterhammel identifies settler colonies, which are the result of a flanked colonising process. The aim is the use of cheap land and an inexpensive workforce. Here, the coloniser displays a permanent kind of presence through farmers and planters who emigrate from the mainland. Furthermore, these colonisers govern the new region, ignoring the rights and interests of the indigenous people (Osterhammel 2009: 17-18). For Okinawa, this is what happened during World War II. The local people were deprived of their land and property should the Japanese Army have need of space to accommodate its soldiers or food to feed them. Further exploitation was accomplished through dictating which seeds Okinawans should plant, or on a sexual scale in the case of the comfort women (Hein and Selden 2003: 16). These were young women who had to serve as prostitutes for the imperial army.

To this day, 75 percent of the US bases in Japan are located on Okinawan territory, although it is the smallest prefecture by far (0.6 percent of Japan's total area). These bases occupy 10.4 percent of Okinawa prefecture, although the percentage is as high as 18.8 percent on Okinawa-jima 沖縄島, the biggest island of the archipelago (Tanji 2006: 1; Asato 2003: 229). This situation has led to a variety of prob-

lems and conflicts in Okinawa today, so that it is hard to say if the period of colonisation is over yet.

Magical realism

Originally, the term 'magical realism' or 'magic realism' was coined by Germany's art scene during the 1920s where it was called *magischer Realismus*. From there it found its way to the Netherlands, Britain, Spain and Latin America; through diverse shifts in the way it was denoted it eventually was applied to literature. There it reached a global peak of popularity in the second half of the 20th century (Bowers 2004: 1-2). For detailed research on the history and differentiation of the term I recommend the works of Bowers (2004) and Choi (2011). In this paper, the theoretical focus will lie on the definition of the term 'magical realism'.

What is magical realism?

One characteristic trait of magical realism seems to be that there is no consensus about its definition in the academic field. Thus in the past it was described in great variety as style or technique (Hart and Ouyang 2005: 14). Furthermore, the terms 'magical realism', 'magic realism' and 'marvellous realism' have been referred to as 'modes, genres or forms of writing or simply [as] cultural concepts' (Bowers 2004: 3). Researchers of the literary field seem to use the term 'narrative mode' most often.

Despite the difficulties of finding a single definition that everybody can agree on, researchers have been trying to sum up the most important characteristics of magical realism. One of them consists of the matter-of-fact way of telling the story. This means that when the magical part shows up in the otherwise entirely realistic setting of a piece of fiction, the mode of narration does not change, and often not even the characters in the fiction find the magic events odd. Thus magic becomes entirely normal, even normative, and 'is no longer quixotic madness' (Zamora and Faris 1995: 3).

Second, magic realist texts generally are regarded as transgressive. This means that they cross boundaries, 'whether the boundaries are ontological, political, geographical, or generic' (Zamora and Faris 1995: 5). Often these boundaries are expressed through the themes, topics and settings of the texts. The process of transgression can also be applied to the structure of the text itself, meaning the magic and the realistic parts. Where these two realms touch a new space is created, namely a magical-realistic one (Bowers 2004: 66-76). It is important to note that even though these two worlds are contradictory by nature and are in conflict at times, they are

still part of the same narrative (Hart and Ouyang 2005: 3,7; Polar 2004: 119). Thus there is no general hierarchic order of the magical and the realistic parts or those that lie in between these two (Slemon 1995: 410). This is of particular significance, as usually the magical part is interpreted as the world of the colonised, whereas the realistic one refers to the colonisers. This way of attribution has led to a lot of debate in the field of literary studies (see Bowers 2004: 121-128), showing not only how sensitive the topic is, but also how lively the discussions on magical realism are.

The third major characteristic of magic realistic texts is their subversive power as they convey political contents. Usually they convey a form of resistance against the current dominant political and cultural structures. These fictions empower those whose voices usually cannot be heard by telling their histories and rediscovering lost languages and beliefs. In this way, other perceptions of realities can be described and to some extent saved from vanishing from the public memory. Typical groups that profit from this empowerment are indigenous or colonised people, and especially female writers (Bowers 2004: 33). According to the literary scholar Elleke Boehmer, the reason why magical realism has become as successful as it has is because it enables authors 'to express their view of a world fissured, distorted, and made incredible by cultural clash and displacement' (Boehmer 2005: 229). The significance of magical realism as a narrative mode of post-colonial writing is thus underlined. This quotation hints further at the notion that magical realistic texts use magic not only to describe folk stories or spiritual beliefs that are about to be forgotten, but also to express a different view on reality. Certainly, readers are challenged here to engage in this new and ever-changing reality. Ideally this produces a new kind of prose, which creates tolerance and acceptance regarding other points of view (Bowers 2004: 4; Wilson 1995: 210).

When a text comes up with a meta-fiction, the audience is challenged even more, since the reader finds him- or herself suddenly incorporated in the story. This narrative trick shows once more how boundaries can be transgressed—in this case, the ones between fictional reality and outer fictional reality (Thiem 1995: 235-236). The literary scholar Wendy Faris is quoted at this point to sum up the points made in this section, and also in order to state more specifically the definition of magical realism:

> First, the texts contain an irreducible element of magic, something we cannot explain according to the laws of the universe. […] Second, the writing contains a detailed description of the phenomenal world. This is the 'realism' of the oxymoron magical realism. […] Third, in these texts, readers may hesitate between two contradictory understandings of events and experience doubts. […] Fourth, there is a near merging of two realms. […] The fifth and final feature of magical realist fiction is that it questions received ideas of time, space, and identity (Faris 1995: 163-190, as cited in Bhowmik 2003: 312).

As Davinder Bhowmik and Ina Hein also employed this five-point definition in their research on magical realism in Okinawan literature, it will be used for the following analyses as well, in order to achieve comparable results.

Magical realism in Japan and Okinawa

So far, no extensive research has been done in regard to magical realist literature from the Japanese main islands: Honshū 本州, Shikoku 四国, Kyūshū 九州 and Hokkaidō 北海道. The few articles that have been written so far mostly present overviews of authors that could at least partly be regarded as magical realistic writers, such as Abe Kōbō 安部公房, Akutagawa Ryūnosuke 芥川龍之介, Inoue Yasushi 井上靖, Izumi Kyōka 泉鏡花, Kawabata Yasunari 川端康成, Murakami Haruki 村上春樹, Nakagami Kenji 中上健二, Natsume Sōseki 夏目漱石 and Ōe Kenzaburō 大江健三郎 (Morris 2005; Napier 1995; Strecher 1999). However, these articles hardly present any in-depth analyses of the texts. Further, the definitions of 'magical realism' differ greatly, so that it is difficult to compare the results.

In the case of magical realism in Okinawan literature, the existing research also consists of a relatively small number of articles; yet there is a common definition and thus a basis for comparison. Thorough analyses of the following texts can be found: 'Suiteki' (水滴 'Droplets', 1996) and 'Mabuigumi' (魂込め 'Spirit Recalling', 1998) by Medoruma Shun (Bhowmik 2003; Hein 2012a: 60-64), 'Aisu bā gāru' (アイスバー・ガール 'Ice Bar Girl', 2004) by Akahoshi Toshizō 赤星十四三 (Hein 2012a: 64-66), and 'Tatakai, tatakau, hae' (戦い、闘う、蠅 'Battle, Fight, Fly', 2000) by Tefu Tefu P てふてふP (Hein 2012a: 66-69).

With regard to Medoruma's fiction, both Bhowmik and Hein come to the conclusion that war, or more explicitly, the Battle of Okinawa, is a major recurring theme (Bhowmik 2003: 316; Hein 2012a: 60), even though the importance of this theme lies in the reviving of memories and narratives of the war, which otherwise might vanish from the public memory (Bhowmik 2003: 318). Medoruma manages to bring the past right into the present by making appear ghosts who are the souls of people who died in the battle. This shows how these texts work with local spiritual beliefs and customs, and thus stresses the location of the plot. Certainly, this strategy could be perceived as reaffirming stereotypical images of Okinawa. These images portray Okinawa as a tropical paradise full of sandy beaches and good-natured, ever happy people; a peaceful place without stress, where religious and folkloristic beliefs and nature are still intact (Hein 2012b: 100-101; Kō 2006: 156-157). This perception of Okinawa in Japan is fostered by tourism campaigns (see Figal 2006 and Tada 2004), as well as by TV shows and films (see Tanaka 2004) that became especially popular during the last nationwide Okinawa boom in the 1990s and the first decade of the 21st century.

Yet, even though some of the above-mentioned writers make use of Okinawan markers, they deconstruct them and quite often turn them into the exact opposite. For instance, Tefu Tefu P brings up the protagonist's grandmother. However, this grandmother is not like the stereotypic vital, friendly and witty Okinawan *obā* おば ぁ who might be expected, but a demonic and evil old woman (Hein 2012a: 67). Medoruma Shun too uses a wide range of typical Okinawa-related themes and clichés in order to deconstruct them one by one as will become clear in the following sections.

Magical realism in Medoruma Shun's fiction

Since this paper focuses on fiction by Medoruma Shun, a short introduction to this writer might be useful. He was born in 1960 in Nakijin 今帰仁, a village in Okinawa, and went to the University of the Ryūkyūs, where he majored in Japanese literature. After graduation he started writing fiction and was awarded the prestigious Akutagawa prize in 1997 for his short story 'Suiteki' ('Droplets'). Being an Okinawan writer he had to work in other jobs as well to cover his living expenses; his final job was as a high school teacher. In his writing, Medoruma does not confine himself only to fiction but also writes essays, blogs and articles for newspapers. Further, he is strongly present among the activists who fight against the relocation of the US airbase of Futenma 普天間 to Henoko 辺野古 (Bhowmik 2008: 131-133). His critical stance regarding socio-political topics is also reflected in his fiction, as the two examples of analyses will show.

'Akai yashi no ha'

The short story 'Akai yashi no ha' (赤い椰子の葉 'The Red Leaves of the Palm Tree') was first published in 1992 in the magazine *Jukai* 樹海 and is also part of a compilation of fiction by Medoruma Shun called *Mabuigumi* (1999). It is a story about a short and difficult friendship between two boys, who are in the sixth year of elementary school on Okinawa. The story is told from the perspective of one of the boys who refers to himself solely as Boku 僕, meaning 'I'. He was born in Okinawa, whereas the other boy, 'S', comes from mainland Japan. Together with his mother he is living in a part of the town that adjoins the US base Kadena 嘉手納. The two boys are fascinated by each other's daily lives and hideouts. The different realities of one seem exotic and foreign to the other. But Boku does not want to admit that he has made friends with S in front of the boys at school and pushes him roughly to the ground one day before class. S drops out of school after that incident, although Boku tries to visit him at home to talk to him.

The text is set in the period of the US occupation of Okinawa after World War II between 1965 and 1972. Boku belongs to the same generation as Medoruma himself, who also went to elementary school during the occupation period. Thus one may assume autobiographical traits, especially regarding Medoruma's perception of the social atmosphere in Okinawa at that time.

Therefore it is not surprising that the text employs the theme of coming-of-age. In the context of the first sexual fantasies and experiences, homosexuality is present on multiple levels. In one scene S almost harasses Boku, which he enjoys at first, but in the end he literally flees from the situation. Later, Boku dreams of S and his mother approaching him in a sensual way, which leads to his first ejaculation. In both situations, Boku enjoys the sensation, but also experiences some inner conflict, because he feels that he is doing something wrong or improper. There are two explanations for this feeling: first, Boku seems to be aware that homosexuality is regarded as something deviant. Second, and more important, sexuality itself as part of growing up seems impure or even forbidden to Boku. Thus the focus lies on the transition from childhood to adolescence, which can be perceived in the following scenes:

During their first tour together, S takes Boku along to the nightclub area where he lives together with his mother. The two boys watch some boxing contests in a backyard, which seem very exciting and fascinating to Boku. However, his interest for the fights suddenly stops when he meets S's mother, whom he obviously finds attractive and exotic. On the next day, Boku takes S along to the forests and shows him 'his' world. The boys encounter indigenous insects and fish that S finds very exciting, whereas Boku pushes on, as he is clearly not interested in childish activities anymore, such as catching fish.

Soon after that the incident at school happens and the boys never meet again. Thus, S was only there for a short but crucial period in Boku's life, during which elements from both childhood and puberty are present, intersecting in Boku's personal development. Further, a new world is generated, in which only Boku and S seem to exist. Thus, not only do the stages of personal development merge, but also two different concepts of reality: Boku's Okinawan everyday life in a family with parents engaged in physical hard work and at least one sibling, and S's nomadic life with his Japanese mother who is working in one of the bars that are frequented by US soldiers. Both boys seem bold and self-confident in their respective environments, but show clear signs of uncertainty when venturing into the other's world.

The difference between the two worlds is perhaps best illustrated by the palm trees referred to in the story's title. They grow in the nightclub area, but their leaves turned red through malnutrition since they are not indigenous to Okinawa but were imported to build up Okinawa's image as a subtropical paradise (Figal 2006: 111-112). At the first glance these plants might be perceived as a connection between the lush natural environment of Okinawa and the grey, urban looks of the nightclub

area, but their bad condition actually stresses even more the differences between these two realities.

Further, the strong connection between S, his mother and the quarter of town that adjoins the US base can be regarded as a subversive element, stressing the close ties between the Japanese government and the US. Medoruma also addresses the dangers presented by the military presence in Okinawa. Towards the end of the short story, Boku is looking for S in the backyard where they watched the boxing fights together. He cannot find him, but gets assaulted by a drunken GI who knocks him unconscious and tries to rape him. This scene undoubtedly calls upon the many violence crimes committed by US soldiers in Okinawa—the group rape of a 12-year-old school girl in 1995 being the best known.

So far, it is clear that the story is set in a realistic environment with typical Okinawan problems. But magical elements also occur in this relatively early text by Medoruma Shun. They can be narrowed down to two scenes: the first magical incident takes place on the day when Boku shows his hideout to S. They come to a headland and take in the view of the ocean that stretches out before them. All of a sudden the boys notice an incredibly long and multi-coloured strand that seems to come directly out of heaven. The two of them gape at it in a trance-like state, during which S gets closer to Boku and starts to touch him (Medoruma 1999a: 106-107). One cannot help but think of Akutagawa Ryūnosuke's 'Kumo no ito' (蜘蛛の糸 'The Spider's Thread', 1918), so that a connection with classical Japanese literature is generated. In Akutagawa's text, the strand connects heaven and hell—in Medoruma's case it is more likely to symbolise the connection between the current reality and an idealised image of a pure Okinawa.

The second magical scene bears strong allusions to Okinawan nature as well. It occurs in the morning after Boku's first ejaculation was caused by his dream of S and his mother. Boku feels guilty and dirty after waking up. He therefore evades his classmates and withdraws to a piece of forest behind the school building, which has a strong connection to his childhood memories. He reaches a small clearing where he closes his eyes and feels how the surrounding trees and bushes reach out to him and encircle him. Their soft branches penetrate his body, push aside the soft flesh and replace it with hard buds (Medoruma 1999a: 111). This incident can be regarded as a metaphor for the final awakening of Boku's sexuality. When he returns to the classroom afterwards the fight with S happens, signalling the end of the stage of transition from childhood to puberty.

The new worlds that are created by the magical elements are strongly linked to natural themes, but have hardly any spiritual or religious background, as is the case in later texts by Medoruma. Nevertheless these worlds can be regarded as subversive, as genuine Okinawan markers are accessible to Boku alone, while S cannot enter these realms by himself. This means that even though Japan might be powerful in Okinawa, these Okinawan realities cannot be entered and therefore not under-

stood by Japanese, if they do not receive any Okinawan help. Thus the text inverts the power relations. An alternative reality, namely an Okinawan reality is created. To Boku these magical incidents constitute a part of reality and therefore he is not scared or irritated by the magical events; on the contrary, he becomes calmer in these situations.

Further, the story shows the conflict between the periphery, Okinawa, and the centre, the Japanese central government and the US occupation forces. This relationship is reflected in the characters themselves: S and his mother represent Japan and maintain close ties with the US, since they live close to the US airbase. They also seem to be in a dependent relationship with them, since the mother works in a bar where the GIs are supposed to spend their money. Boku, who embodies Okinawa, stands without any allies and even gets physically hurt by a US soldier. Thus, 'Akai yashi no ha' clearly has a strong subversive tone pointing towards the hardships Okinawa has to sustain because of the maltreatment by both the US and Japan. However, this critique is more strongly voiced in the realistic parts than in the magical scenes. The following section shows how over the course of time this tendency is reversed in Medoruma's fiction.

'Umukaji tō chiritei'

The short story 'Umukaji tō chiritei' (面影と連れて 'Taking Traces', 1999) was written after 'Suiteki' and was first published in the magazine *Shōsetsu Tripper* 小説トリッパー. It is also part of the collection of short stories called *Mabuigumi*, which was published in the same year. This text tells the story of an Okinawan woman who possesses spiritual powers that enable her to communicate with the souls (*mabui* 魂) of the deceased. She spends her life in the same small village where her grandmother raised her. Since birth she has suffered from a minor form of some mental handicap, which becomes obvious through her learning disability. Furthermore, she finds it hard to engage in human relationships. Similarly to Boku in 'Akai yashi no ha', she refers to herself merely as Uchi 内, which is another word for 'I'. In spite of her handicap she manages to handle everyday life after her grandmother suddenly passes away. To secure her income she works in a bar where she finally starts to engage in relationships with the owner ('Mama-san' ママさん, 'mother') and the other hostesses ('Nee-san' 姉さん, 'big sisters'). Moreover she makes friends with a male customer, with whom she eventually falls in love. One night he leaves the village in a mad rush, so that she finds herself left alone once again. Sometime later Uchi gets arrested by the police, who interrogate her because of her relationship with that man. In the end she gets raped by two strangers in her own house. After that incident she flees to another realm between life and death before she finally dies.

The most distinctive stylistic feature of this short story is the way in which the readers are directly addressed. Although it is written from a first person's point of view, it addresses an interlocutor whose identity remains unknown until the very end, so readers get the impression that Uchi is talking to them.

The small village in which the story is set is located on Okinawa-jima, the main island of the prefecture. Most of the customers in the bar are construction workers, who are building the Ocean EXPO Park, close to Motobu 本部 in the northwestern end of the island. The workers, such as the man Uchi falls in love with, are staying in the village, so that it can be assumed that it lies near Motobu. Thus, the area is quite remote, not only from a mainland Japanese standpoint, but also from the perspective of Okinawa prefecture's capital city Naha 那覇, creating a double periphery. Since the differences between urban and rural environments become obvious, the image of one homogenous Okinawa is revised in the process.

The period in which the text is set begins approximately ten years after the end of World War II, when Uchi is born. Thus it is once more the period of the US occupation, although in contrast to 'Akai yashi no ha' this is hardly noticeable in this text. Perhaps the reason lies in the remote setting, far away from US bases, or in Uchi's limited ability of perception.

The spiritual skills that both Uchi and her grandmother possess play a central role. Both of them can see the *mabui* and thus can help them to pass over to the afterlife by listening to their life stories. Often these stressful memories concern the war and the Battle of Okinawa; they are thoughts and experiences that the living do not want to talk about, since they are too painful to recall. By employing these ghostly characters, Medoruma crosses the limits of time and shows how memories live on and traumatise following generations.

The encounters with the *mabui* always occur under a *gajumaru* 細葉榕 tree (*ficus microcarpa*), which also serves as Uchi's hideout. It is located close to a sacred site where the local priestesses (*kaminchu* 神人) worship the deities. Uchi's grandmother leads this group of *kaminchu* and therefore believes her granddaughter's report of encounters with the *mabui*. Nevertheless she instructs her not to tell anybody else about her abilities, since it would only lead to people becoming envious. However, this might also be a strategy to protect Uchi from being perceived as mad or mentally ill thus being maltreated by society.

The depiction of the grandmother as a hardworking, friendly, but slightly stubborn woman with spiritual abilities clearly hints to the stereotypical image of the Okinawan *obā*. Yet Medoruma deconstructs this ideal image: shortly before she passes away the grandmother says that her last wish is for Uchi to become a *kaminchu*. Even though the granddaughter promises to do so, she fails eventually, as all the remaining priestesses pass away too quickly to teach her. Thus, the grandmother's last wish is never fulfilled, and the spiritual knowledge is lost forever.

Although Uchi was dependent on her grandmother, she decides against going back to her family in Naha, but stays in the village and starts working in a bar. Things seem to develop positively, but take a very negative turn as soon as the man she falls in love with leaves. Shortly afterwards she gets arrested and interrogated by the police, who claim that the man was planning an assault on the Japanese crown prince, who was expected to attend the opening ceremony of the Ocean EXPO Park. This turn of the story hints unmistakeably to an actual incident in Okinawan history: the assault on the then crown prince Akihito 明仁 and his wife who visited Okinawa in 1975. At that time left-wing extremists of the Okinawa Liberation League threw Molotov cocktails at the couple.

However, Uchi does not reveal any information about the man, even though the police threaten her more and more. Even so, she concludes that violence cannot be an answer to any problem. Thus Uchi personifies Okinawa's stereotypical peacefulness. Again Medoruma deconstructs this stereotype by the brutal, ill-founded rape that happens shortly after Uchi is released.

Badly wounded, both physically and mentally, the protagonist flees to her hideout, where she enters a state between life and death. This becomes clear when Uchi meets her grandmother amidst fantastic scenery of exotic-looking fish, birds and butterflies that seem less frightening than fascinating. The grandmother tells her that it is too early to come to this place and so the magical elements vanish and the young woman is left in the cold forest to drag herself back home.

There she awakes the next morning for a short while. She describes being in a cold, dark, wide and silent place, not knowing where she is. It does not become clear if this is a metaphor for the real world, which has turned into something entirely alien for Uchi, or if she has passed away. However, she notes that she does not want to look into the faces of people who know about the rape and that she would like to kill the two men who did that to her. Thus, her peaceful and tender attitude is destroyed by the violent and brutal reality of post-war Okinawa.

In the last scene of the story Uchi is sitting under the *gajumaru* tree again. Finally the reader learns that it is a young girl whom she is telling her life story to. It is likely that Uchi has become a *mabui* herself and needs to tell her story before she can enter the after-world. The very last sentence is incomplete, which might be hinting to her dissolving as she was able to find someone to listen to her.

At this point the narrative circle is closed; it feels as if it was the reader who listened to the story of a *mabui* and thus possesses the spiritual abilities of a *kaminchu*. In this way the reader's perception of reality gets deconstructed, and one feels compelled to help in the preservation of that fictional world. Thus Medoruma with this short story enables outsiders to experience Okinawan realities.

Further, the story not only presents some magical elements such as the ghostly *mabui* and the fantastic creatures and plants Uchi sees in the woods, but turns into one great magical incident where Uchi's *mabui* tells her life-story. The following

section will show how these two short stories match the five conditions by Wendy Faris and what these analyses add to the existing state of research on magical realism in the works of Medoruma Shun and other Okinawan authors.

Fantastic realities

Looking again at the analyses of the short stories 'Akai yashi no ha' and 'Umukaji tō chiritei', as well as the analysis of 'Suiteki' by Davinder Bhowmik, it is noticeable that the magical incidents and elements in Medoruma's fictional texts become more frequent with time. These changes are illustrated in Figure 1, which shows how each of these texts relates to Faris' five conditions of magical realism (Faris 1995: 167-173, as cited in Bhowmik 2003: 312). In 'Akai yashi no ha', the realistic parts still dominate the text and most of the subversive moments are found in these parts as well. In 'Suiteki', more magical elements can be found as they become more visible in situations of everyday life. Finally, in 'Umukaji tō chiritei', realistic and magical parts seem to be equally important, forming a hybrid reality that also invades the reader's own world. Thus, the magical becomes more important in the fictional lives of the protagonists with each text. However, the magical does not replace the realistic, but merges with it to create a new reality.

Figure 1 Comparison of Medoruma's short stories in regard to Faris' criteria (Faris 1995: 167-173)

Title / W.B. Faris' Criteria	"Akai yashi no ha" (1992)	"Suiteki" (1996) (Bhowmik 2003: 312)	"Umukaji tō chiritei" (1999)
The texts contain an irreducible element of magic	yes, albeit to a small extent (the multi-coloured strand, mergence with the forest)	yes (strange and sudden disease; water dripping from the toe; phantom soldiers)	yes, most of the text is pervaded by magic (*mabui*, fantastic fauna and flora)
The writing contains a detailed description of the phenomenal world	most parts of the text are written in a realistic manner	apart from the magical incidents the story is embedded in a realistic setting and contains detailed descriptions of the material world	the depiction of the daily life in the village appears perfectly realistic
Readers may hesitate between two contradictory understandings of events and experience doubts	the strand could seem magical to the two boys only; the state of trance could be a state of sleep in which the protagonist would dream about the incident	the reader cannot know for sure if the ghosts really exist or if they are just part of a hallucination of the protagonist	the protagonist experiences the magical incidents alone and might suffer from a mental handicap
There is a near mergence of two realms	mergence of the Okinawan and the Japanese/American realities, which is symbolised by the strand; albeit, more merging happens in the realistic scenes	the worlds of the living and the dead as well as past and present merge	the past merges with the present, the world of the dead with that of the living
The text questions received ideas of time, space, and identity	during the magical incidents time seems to stop, since the protagonist seems to be in trance; his sense of identity changes as well after these moments	a new kind of space and time is created by the nightly ghost visits; the boundaries between past and present become more than blurry, affecting the protagonist's identity	through the mergence of past and present a new perception of time is created; the metafiction deconstructs the identities of the protagonist and the reader alike

Not only does the frequency of the magical events increase, but also their duration. In the first short story, they are just a few and do not last very long. In 'Suiteki', the magical elements increase, but still remain limited to a certain period of time, in which the protagonist is ill. In the last text, magical elements permeate the realistic parts throughout the protagonist's whole life and the twist at the end even turns the whole story itself into one big magical incident.

At the same time, the magical gains influence over the realistic until they merge and form one inseparable realm. In 'Akai yashi no ha', the magical influences the real through the changes invoked in Boku. In 'Suiteki', the magical incidents become partly visible to others as well, as they notice the swollen big toe and the water dripping from it that are the visible symptoms of the protagonist's strange disease. The water even has effects on people as it works as a miracle cure for so long as the illness lasts. In 'Umukaji tō chiritei', the conversations with the *mabui* influence Uchi greatly by teaching her knowledge of the past that would have been unknown to her otherwise. By encompassing the reader as well and turning the whole story into a conversation with a *mabui*, the story not only influences the fictional but also the reader's own reality.

Further, the nature of the magical elements changes with each of the short stories analysed. At first they consist of Okinawan flora and fauna; then ghosts and an unknown disease can be found; finally, all of these elements are used in the last text, thus relating to the natural environment and religious folk beliefs alike. Another change concerns the opponents that are fought against by the texts' subversiveness. At first the US is partly used as the Other against which the Okinawan Self is constructed and defined. However, the US occupiers become less important until they are not even mentioned anymore in the last short story, even though it is set during the period of the American occupation. The role of mainland Japan as the Other is also processed in different ways. In 'Akai yashi no ha', Boku, who represents Okinawa, see-saws between affection and aversion and cannot get rid of these ambivalent feelings. In 'Suiteki', Japan is hardly mentioned, but is still present in the wartime memories of the protagonist, who had to serve as a member of the Imperial Army during the Battle of Okinawa. In 'Umukaji tō chiritei', mainland Japan can only be sensed by the upcoming visit of the crown prince and the planned assault on him, which points towards the problematic relationship.

The Okinawans themselves, on the other hand, seem to become the target of critiques more often in the later stories. One example is the carelessness with which war memories are treated. In 'Suiteki', the main character even profits from making up different war stories, which he tells to school classes, while he does not want to confront his real experiences. In 'Umukaji tō chiritei', Medoruma shows that Okinawans discriminate against their own people if they are mentally handicapped and thus contradicts the mainstream image of Okinawa's gentleness. He thus also decon-

structs the image of a homogenous Okinawa by providing views on a variety of problems.

Although these three stories seem to be diverse in terms of themes and topics, they also have some aspects in common. All of them are politically motivated and stress the dangers of outside influences on Okinawa, its society and traditions. The theme of coming-of-age is central to both of the short stories analysed above and can be understood as a metaphor for a young, developing region, facing an 'adult' nation-state. In the Okinawan case, this theme describes the relationship with both the US and mainland Japan, as 'Akai yashi no ha' exemplifies. Medoruma himself writes in one of his essays that it is important to him to provide an alternative perspective to the winner's view, especially in regard to the Battle of Okinawa (Medoruma 2012: 59). Bhowmik's résumé on Medoruma Shun in her monograph matches this statement as well:

> For Medoruma, history is of utmost importance; his works delve deeply into the past to show the gulf that lies between personal and public memory. Moreover, the fact that his works depart from reality marks a break from the social realism of much of the genre [*Okinawa bungaku*]. By employing the mode of magic realism, Medoruma takes the genre to new heights, liberating it from a tendency to document what goes on in the hearts and minds of people before and after the events that make history. While this history from the inside holds great appeal for those wishing to understand what Japan's textbooks have left out, it is Medoruma's imaginative narrative strategies that allow his works to stand on their own, alongside those of other internationally acclaimed authors (Bhowmik 2008:182).

As this quote shows, Medoruma is striving to oppose a single homogenous public memory in his literary works and tries to keep real memories clean from the 'pollution' of mainstream media. Even though he shares these concerns with other Okinawan authors, his works stand out for their use of magical realism. By employing this narrative mode, Medoruma succeeds in drawing up silenced or forgotten parts of Okinawan history in an original way and thus makes this knowledge accessible for an audience that was born after these events. He especially addresses Okinawan readers to remind them of their own history and traditions.

By doing so, Medoruma uncovers hidden Okinawan realities and contributes to their persistence. He documents changes in the landscape and customs and thus shows which of them are at risk of being lost forever. Yet he does not turn a misty-eyed gaze on Okinawa. As Uchi's fate in 'Umukaji tō chiritei' exemplifies, Medoruma does not advocate a transfixed or passive past-oriented attitude. On the contrary, he wants to awake Okinawans to resist foreign rule.

In his literary works, Medoruma Shun creates new, ambiguous worlds. On the one hand, the magical provides a shelter where people can hide from reality or everyday life, as 'Akai yashi no ha' shows. Even though it is an escapist attitude, it results in changes to reality that become visible in Boku's behaviour. On the other

hand, the magical can force people to confront their own past, as is the case in 'Suiteki'. As 'Umukaji tō chiritei' demonstrates, the magical can also be used to learn about the past even if one's own memories are not directly concerned. Together with the various depictions and non-depictions of the US, mainland Japan and Okinawa itself, Medoruma's literary works offer a multi-facetted view on Okinawan problems and realities.

Thus, Medoruma does not claim one single Okinawan identity. He tries rather to provide as many alternative identities as possible—be they different from the image constructed in Japanese mainstream media or from what is perceived as 'normal' within Okinawan society. This realisation is important and picks at the monolith-like Japan-Okinawa dichotomy, which is often perceived and accepted as given; both, Japan and Okinawa, are diverse.

It is important, though, to keep in mind that Medoruma Shun is not the only Okinawan author around, albeit probably the best-known and politically most subversive contemporary writer in the region. Other Okinawan writers as well have employed magical realism, as Hein has showed (see section on 'Magical realism', above). Yet, their works seem to be more or less apolitical and they do not use as many stereotypical markers for 'the Okinawan' anymore (Hein 2012a: 70). The short story 'Eggu' (エッグ 'The Egg', 2003) by Gotō Rieko 後藤利衣子 affirms these findings. It is the story of a young woman who finds herself laying an egg one evening. She realises that she has to act like an adult now as the child that is supposed to hatch from the egg one day needs to be taken care of. However, the story remains confined to private life and does not touch upon any historical, social or political context in special regard to Okinawa.

It is nonetheless necessary to mention that other authors of *Okinawa bungaku* do touch upon political topics such as the Battle of Okinawa, everyday life in close vicinity to the US bases and the relationship with mainland Japan. However, most of them do not employ magical realism to convey their message. One example of this kind of contemporary Okinawan literature is the text 'Debu no Bongo ni yurarete' (デブのボンゴに揺られて 'Swayed by the Big Bongo Car', 1980) by Higa Shūki 比嘉秀喜. It tells the story of a young male university graduate in Okinawa, who works in a rug-cleaning company as he cannot find any other job. Thanks to this occupation he comes into contact with rich American families who are living in gated communities and whose everyday lives differ greatly from those of common Okinawans. A further and more recent example is Ōshiro Yūji's 大城裕次 'Burū raibu no natsu' (ブルーライブの夏 'The Summer of Melancholic Live Shows', 2002). It also features a young male as its main character; he does not have a proper work contract, but lives from jobbing here and there. His only means of leisure are his nightly visits to a local jazz bar. There, one evening, an incident occurs that involves a US soldier and a murder. However, it turns out that the American is not guilty, so that the mischievous remarks against the young GI turn into a critique of

Okinawan racism and prejudice. Similarly to Medoruma, Ōshiro too criticises his fellow Okinawans and shows how ambiguous and multi-facetted everyday life is. There is no way to tell if the characters are good or bad; instead the weaknesses and problems of diverse groups are highlighted.

Thus, individual problems and their possible solutions are not connected to a character's geographical origin, nationality or gender. Social standing and each character's environment are far more influential and connect people across the boundaries of the former categories. Not every Okinawan is a victim, not every GI is a perpetrator and not every Japanese person comes from a huge city such as Tōkyō or Ōsaka. Higa Shūki deconstructs the stereotypical power relations in regard to gender in his short story. Here, the well-educated, male university graduate leads a relatively poor life as a rug-cleaner. He finds himself working for rich, white American women and thus the post-colonial image of the male coloniser and the female colonised is weakened (see Boehmer 2005: 216).

Readers find themselves in an outsider's perspective in these stories and can only try to empathise with the fictional characters. Magical realism, on the other hand, enables all readers alike to approach these fantastic realities, since 'real' realities are not threatened by these alternative views, but merge with them at best. In the case of 'Umukaji tō chiritei', the reader actually becomes drawn into the story and thus can identify with the fictional realities even more. Therefore the question of how the use of magical realism in contemporary Okinawan fiction enhances the understanding of Okinawan realities can be answered as follows: this specific narrative mode provides outsiders with the possibility of entering an unknown world, so that they can actually experience it. In other words, magical realism has the potential to add the quality of personal experience of political, cultural and religious matters to the ability to empathise with the characters, thereby encompassing and integrating the reader.

This paper has focussed mainly on two works by Medoruma Shun. It seems reasonable therefore to pursue this branch of research and to look for further texts that use magical realism both by Medoruma and other authors of *Okinawa bungaku*. Furthermore, from the viewpoint of post-colonial studies, it would be interesting to conduct research on Okinawan literature not only in the setting of Japanese literature, but also in a broader Asian context, in order to further deconstruct the Okinawa-Japan dichotomy.

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GLOSSARY

Abe Kōbō	安部公房	Japanese writer (1924–1993)
'Aisu bā gāru'	アイスバー・ガール	'Ice Bar Girl'; short story by Akahoshi Toshizō (2004)
Akahoshi Toshizō	赤星十四三	Japanese writer (b. 1974)
'Akai yashi no ha'	赤い椰子の葉	'The Red Leaves of the Palm Tree'; short story by Medoruma Shun (1992)
Akihito	明仁	name of the present *tennō* (b. 1933)
Akutagawa-shō	芥川賞	most prestigious national literary award for new authors in Japan, awarded half-yearly
Akutagawa Ryūnosuke	芥川龍之介	Japanese writer (1892–1927)
boku	ぼく/僕	I (first person singular; typically used by men)
'Burū raibu no natsu'	ブルーライブの夏	'The Summer of Melancholic Live Shows'; short story by Ōshiro Yūji (2002)
'Debu no Bongo ni yurarete'	デブのボンゴに揺られて	'Swayed by the Big Bongo Car'; short story by Higa Shūki (1980)
'Eggu'	エッグ	'The Egg'; short story by Gotō Rieko (2003)
Futenma	普天間	United States airbase in the southwest of Okinawa-jima
gajumaru	細葉榕	indigenous kind of tree on the Okinawan islands; sometimes worshipped as sacred tree
Henoko	辺野古	district of the city of Nago 名護 in the northeast of Okinawa-jima
Higa Shūki	比嘉秀喜	Japanese writer (b. 1952)
Hokkaidō	北海道	northernmost main island of Japan
Honshū	本州	central main island of Japan
Inoue Yasushi	井上靖	Japanese writer (1907–1991)
Izumi Kyōka	泉鏡花	Japanese writer (1873–1939)
Jukai	樹海	*Huge Forest*; title of a literary magazine
Kadena	嘉手納	military base in the west of Okinawa-jima
kaminchu	神人	shaman-like priestesses in Okinawan traditional folk beliefs
Kawabata Yasunari	川端康成	Japanese writer (1899–1972)
'Kumo no ito'	蜘蛛の糸	'The Spider's Thread'; story by Akutagawa Ryūnosuke (1918)
Kyūshū	九州	southernmost main island of Japan
mabui	魂	similar to a person's soul, according to Okinawan folk beliefs
'Mabuigumi'	魂込め	'Spirit Recalling'; short story by Medoruma Shun (1998); also title of an anthology (1999)
mama-san	ママさん	literally 'mother', female barkeeper
Medoruma Shun	目取真俊	Japanese writer (b. 1960)

Motobu	本部	town in the northwest of Okinawa-jima
Murakami Haruki	村上春樹	Japanese writer (b. 1949)
Naha	那覇	capital of Okinawa prefecture located in the southwest of Okinawa-jima
Nakijin	今帰仁	village in the northwest of Okinawa-jima
nee-san	姉さん	big sister
Norimatsu Satoko Oka	乗松聡子	director of the Peace Philosophy Centre
Nakagami Kenji	中上健二	Japanese writer (1946–1992)
Natsume Sōseki	夏目漱石	Japanese writer (1867–1916)
obā	おばぁ	Okinawan for 'grandmother'
Ōe Kenzaburō	大江健三郎	Japanese writer (b. 1935)
Okinawa	沖縄	Okinawa; southernmost prefecture of Japan
Okinawa-jima	沖縄島	main island of Okinawa prefecture; also referred to as Okinawa hontō 沖縄本島
Okinawa bungaku	沖縄文学	Okinawan literature
Ōshiro Yūji	大城裕次	Japanese writer (b. 1973)
Ryūkyū/Ryūkyūs	琉球	island chain forming Okinawa prefecture; formerly Ryūkyū Kingdom (1429–1872)
Satsuma	薩摩	former Japanese province in the south of Kyūshū
Shikoku	四国	smallest of Japan's main islands south of Honshū
Shōsetsu Tripper	小説トリッパー	*Novel Tripper*; literary magazine
'Suiteki'	水滴	'Droplets'; short story by Medoruma Shun (1996); also title of an anthology (2000)
'Tatakai, tatakau, hae'	戦い、闘う、蠅	'Battle, Fight, Fly'; short story by Tefu Tefu P (2000)
Tefu Tefu P	てふてふP	penname of the Japanese writer Tominaga Naoya 富永尚也 (1976–2013)
tennō	天皇	Japanese emperor
Tōkyō	東京	capital of Japan
uchi	うち/内	I (first person singular; typically used by women and children)
'Umukaji tō chiritei'	面影と連れて	'Taking Traces'; short story by Medoruma Shun (1999)
Yonaha Keiko	与那覇恵子	researcher of Japanese literature